Vietnam Jigsaw #1

**The Cold War Climate and the Domino Theory**

During World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union (Russia and its member states) - the U.S.S.R. - were allies against Germany and Japan. They won the war together. But the two countries had very different ideas on governing. The U.S. believed in the right of people to elect their leaders and live freely; the U.S.S.R. believed in limited freedom and a strong, dominant central government. Free people will never knowingly choose to place themselves under a communist government, so the U.S.S.R. was trying to force itself on other countries with military force. It had done so in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and other countries. The U.S.S.R. had a formidable army, whose weapons included atomic and nuclear bombs and the means to deliver them. So the U.S. and other free countries feared that communism would spread. This was the essence of the **domino theory**.

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**

"You have a row of dominoes set up; you knock over

the first one, and what will happen to the last one is that

it will go over very quickly." President Dwight D.

Eisenhower, 1954.

Memories of Hitler's attempt to dominate the world were still fresh. It could happen again. Both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson believed that the domino theory was applicable in Indo-China. There was real concern in the United States, and outright fear in much of the rest of the free world, that communism might overtake us.

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

In 1950, the United States announced that it would provide military and economic support to countries that were being invaded by communist forces.

**Vietnam** is a relatively small country located south

of China in Southeast Asia. Vietnam had been engaged in an internal struggle for many years. Before World War II, France had claimed Vietnam as a colony. After the war, the Vietnam's leader, Ho Chi Minh, declared Vietnam as an independent, communist country. The French tried to protect their interest, if only to keep Vietnam out of communist control. But the French abandoned Vietnam in 1954, having determined that it was not worth the cost. Vietnam was divided into two parts: North Vietnam was under Ho Chi Minh's control, while the south remained free.

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

Appendix #34a

**Vietnam** is a relatively small country located south of China in Southeast Asia. Vietnam had been engaged in an internal struggle for many years. Before World War II, France had claimed Vietnam as a colony. After the war, the Vietnam's leader, Ho Chi Minh, declared Vietnam as an independent, communist country. The French tried to protect their interest, if only to keep Vietnam out of communist control. But the French abandoned Vietnam in 1954, having determined that it was not worth the cost. Vietnam was divided into two parts: North Vietnam was under Ho Chi Minh's control, while the south remained free.

**Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?**

Then there were the **boomers**.... 76 million spoiled, adolescent brats, used to getting our way... rapidly approaching draft age.

The cold war, Vietnam, and the boomer generation were like three trains heading directly toward each other. The explosion took place in the late 60s.

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**Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?**

Appendix #34b

Vietnam Jigsaw #2

**How We Got There**

The seeds of the Vietnam War go back to the 50s, when President Eisenhower sent a few military advisors to help the South Vietnam military. President Kennedy continued this support. Some people speculate that Kennedy planned to expand U.S. involvement, while other purists have concluded that he intended to retreat and end U.S. involvement in Vietnam altogether. In 1961 President Kennedy said, "Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place."

Connections: What do I already know about this?

We will never know his intentions, though Kennedy had eagerly served in the military; he was aggressive and not afraid to use military strength. And the global threat of growing communism was very real.

*Robert Dallek's book on President Kennedy, "An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963," supports the theory that Kennedy intended to withdraw from Vietnam in his second term. But that is mostly supposition. Retreating is not in the style of the WWII veteran who said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." (President Kennedy's inaugural address, January 20, 1961.)*

*Of President Kennedy and Vietnam, author and historian George Will wrote, "Astonishingly callow when inaugurated, he was unable to stem or even discern the intragovernmental delusions and deceits that propelled the Bay of Pigs invasion just 87 days into his presidency. Much flowed from that debacle. Kennedy said that to reverse Nikita Khrushchev's assessment of him as weak, he had to find somewhere to show U.S. resolve: 'The only place we can do that is in Vietnam. We have to send more people there.' Soon he was at the Vienna summit, where Khrushchev, impervious to his charm, concluded that he was 'a pygmy.'"*

We know that, in 1964, while Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater demanded a strong stance against communism throughout the world, President Johnson ran as the peace candidate, criticizing Senator Goldwater's bellicose position. But at the same time, behind the scenes President Johnson was preparing a huge military buildup in Vietnam. He wanted to do away with communism in Vietnam and put it behind him so that he could focus attention on his domestic social agenda, the program he called the Great Society.

Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?

The president was looking for an "excuse" to prepare for military involvement in Vietnam. In August, 1964, Congress approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which authorized the president to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." (The North Vietnamese had fired on the battleship U.S.S. Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin, though some claimed that no such event took place.)

Appendix #34c

Lyndon Johnson won the election in 1964; it was one of the biggest landslides in American history. Shortly after the election President Johnson announced a substantial increase in U.S. aid to South Vietnam "to restrain the mounting infiltration of men and equipment by the Hanoi regime in support of the Vietcong." (The Vietcong were the "bad guys.") The war had begun, though contrary to current popular belief, the Vietnam War was never a declared war. Officially, it was a "police action." By the end of 1964, 23,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam. As the fighting continued through the late 60s, President Johnson simply could not find a way out. He was determined not to be the first American president to lose a war. This was paramount in his mind.

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

The Vietnam War was, in effect, a war pitting the U.S. against the U.S.S.R. and China. Those two countries provided enormous support to the North Vietnamese, though Chinese and U.S.S.R. troops were not involved. Still, it was seen as a war between the superpowers, albeit at an arm's length.

**Do you feel a draft here?**

**  
Back in the bad old days, registering for the selective service meant you were probably going to be drafted into military service. And once you were drafted, you were probably going to Vietnam. Oh, you might get lucky and end up in South Korea or West Germany. But you had no say in the matter. (It was mostly a guy thing... women were not drafted and served no active combat role in the military.) At age 18, we were required to register for the draft and perhaps serve in the military, and maybe die for our country. But since the voting age was 21, we were not allowed to select our leaders. There did seem to be something wrong with that.  
  
Oh, you could get a deferment if you were a full time high school or college student. But aside from that, and a few other special cases, you were going to see a lot more of the world than you wanted to... compliments of Uncle Sam. About 40% of eligible boomer males eventually were drafted.  
  
Ten thousand boomers took another way out... by heading north to Canada. The Canadian government would not force them to return. But it was a one-way trip; if you tried to come back into the U.S., you were subject to prosecution.  
  
The typical tour of duty in the military was two years.... six weeks of rugged basic training, 10 months in direct preparation, and then a year in Vietnam. If you made it through that with no physical or mental scars... you were in the minority. If you volunteered before you were drafted, you might get to choose a specialty (and thus, perhaps avoid front line combat); or, you might get to serve somewhere other than Vietnam. But if you volunteered, your term was four years, not two.**

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

Appendix #34d

**  
I should also note that millions of boomers willingly served proudly in the military; tens of thousands chose the military as a career and have spent their entire adult life serving honorably in the military. But they were, by far, the exception, not the rule.**

**By the numbers:**

**For the duration of the war, there were about 27 million American men of draft age. Of those, about 2 million served in Vietnam. That's about 7 percent. Of the 2 million who did serve in Vietnam, there were about 50,000 deaths. An American soldier serving in Vietnam, then, had about a 2.5% chance of being killed in combat.**

Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?

**The lottery: Prior to 1970, men eligible for the draft (in the 18-26 age category) were selected by age; the oldest went first. Once you lost your deferment, you never knew when your number might come up. But in December, 1969, the Selective Service Administration conducted the first of what would be four lotteries. The first one was for every male between 18 and 26 years old who had not served in the military. (In subsequent years, the lottery applied only to those men who turned 18 during the year.) Numbers were chosen at random, one for every day of the year. Your number was based on your date of birth. If you drew a low number... say, below 150, you were probably going to be drafted. (Each local draft board was required to provide a certain number of inductees. They started with number 1 and worked their way up each year, as necessary.) If you had a high number... say, over 250, you were probably safe. The final lottery was conducted in 1972 for 1973 inductees, those born in 1953.**

Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?

Appendix #34e

Vietnam Jigsaw #3

**Here's Another Fine Mess**

An old adage says that "the first casualty of war is the truth." How true! In the Vietnam war, everybody lied to everybody! Most importantly, the top military command on the ground in Vietnam lied to the top military command in Washington, who then lied to the president. Up to the very end, they claimed that the enemy was weaker than they were and that victory was just a few months away and required only a few thousand more American troops. The president lied to the people, and the press... at the very least, painted the picture the way they wanted you to see it. They all lied... while baby boomers paid the ultimate price.

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**

In June of 1965, Congress (controlled by the Democrats) authorized the use of ground troops in Vietnam. "The Vietcong are going to collapse within weeks," said President Johnson's National Security Adviser, Walt Whitman Rostow; "Not months, but weeks." 125,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam. The military buildup continued through the late 60s. Vietnam was always at the top of the news, but there were plenty of other things that distracted the attention of the country.

You need to understand that the U.S. was very, very different in 1968 than it is today! ***Whew!*** In addition to race riots in L.A., Detroit, and other big cities, two major political figures (Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy) were assassinated within a span of 60 days. The U.S. troop count in Vietnam was approaching 550,000, and hundreds of body bags were coming back every week... filled with the bodies of baby boomers. Look at our outrage in 1995 when 168 Americans were killed in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma. Well, the body count from Vietnam was over 200.... every week. ***Every week!*** I know it is different, but...

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

The anti-war protests reached their peak in 1970 and 1971. In November 1969, 250,000 boomers had marched against the war in Washington, D.C. (I was there; it was actually a demonstration against just about whatever was conventional at the time.) By the spring of 1970, demonstrations were common on most large campuses, the more liberal, the more demonstrations there were. (The students usually chose spring because... well, because the weather was better then.... nobody wanted to march in the streets in the middle of January! Springtime demonstrations delayed and sometimes canceled those awful end-of-term exams. It was a bonus and an added incentive for those to whom the war was not a seminal issue. Not everyone was against the war, but everyone ***was*** against spring finals!)

Appendix #34f

On several campuses, students actually took over the president's office or his on-campus residence, trashed the place and occupied the building for several days while making all kinds of outrageous demands. It was really nutty!

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

In fairness, many kids (and many adults) did see the war as a moral atrocity. (But I see the federal inheritance tax as a moral atrocity, too.) But for most of them, it was primarily a way to show their independence, a clear breaking away from the nest, a sharp poke in the eye of authority. And there were over 50 million of us in our teens and early 20s. There were just too many of us to ignore.

The boomer kids called President Nixon every nasty name on earth... then they made up a few new ones to call him. (That is ironic, because it was Nixon who supported the amendment to lower the voting age to 18; it was Nixon who proposed and set up the military lottery system, which added stability to the system; it was Nixon who led us out of the war; and it was Nixon who ended the draft. Still, reason and logic were not part of the strategy. Civil mayhem was. Trust me... I was there.)

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

I was a reporter for the campus radio station, WAMU, in Washington, D.C. On the Friday evening before the big November 1969 protest downtown, I reported that there was tear gas and riots near DuPont Circle, and advised listeners to avoid the area. Then I went off the air, and headed straight for DuPont Circle. The pattern for the protesters was to provoke the police to take some kind of action, and then retreat to safety. Yes, there was shouting; yes, there was tear gas. But it was not about the Vietnam War; it was about getting a reaction out of the police. (Lemme tell you... tear gas is mighty debilitating... it does what it is supposed to do!) It was foolish... and dangerous.

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

The following day I covered a march to the Washington Monument. As they walked, the marchers shouted, "Peace now! Peace now!" But their attitude seemed more like, "Peace now; peace now... or I'll knock your block off. In fact, I think I'll knock your block off, anyway. Get out of my way, you commie-pinko!"

Appendix #34g

The war was on page one of the newspaper every day. And more importantly, it was the lead story on the network television news nearly every evening... for eight years. This was the first war in American history that was fought on television, in front of everyone's eyes. And like all hand to hand combat, it was ugly. Oh, we did not have satellite transmission and live coverage back then. But reporters and cameramen were on the front lines, filming every gory aspect of the war. The war was tough to take, even from the confines of your living room couch. And there appeared to be no end in sight. The war went on and on, from 1965 to 1966... to 1970... and on through 1972.... on and on. And so did the killing. Though it claimed far fewer lives, it lasted far longer than did World War II.

**Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?**

**Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?**

Appendix #34h

Vietnam Jigsaw #4

**Bungle in the Jungle**

I am not the right person to write about the fighting in Vietnam; there are many books on that topic written by knowledgeable authors. But I can tell you that the Vietnam war was like no other war before or since. It was not like the Civil War, where disease was as much of a problem as bullets. And it was not like Desert Storm (1991), where the enemy was easy to spot and gave up as fast as you could corral him together. This was different, and very ugly.

The soldiers who fought in Vietnam were much younger than those who fought in World War II or the Korean War. Oh, maybe not much younger... by the calendar. But being 19 in 1969 was a lot different than being 19 in 1942. (And it was different than being 19 in 2005, I can tell you that for sure!) Face it; our troops were not emotionally prepared for what they encountered in Vietnam.

The environment was much different, too. In the early 60s comedian Bill Cosby wrote and performed a wonderful comedy routine called "The Flip of the Coin." Describing the rules of engagement for the Revolutionary War, he said, "OK, you rebels (those who wanted independence from England), you can go anywhere you want, wear anything you want, and fight with anything you want. You British, you have to wear bright red uniforms and march in a straight line."

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**

In a very rough sense, that's what fighting in Vietnam was like. You had no idea who or where the enemy might be. We were fighting in their territory, and they made the most of it. A 10 year-old boy walking toward you might just want something to eat. Or he might be carrying a hand grenade.

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

In 1968, U.S. General William Westmoreland, the U.S. commander in Vietnam, claimed that "the enemy has been defeated at every turn." In a strict sense, he was perhaps right. The Americans never lost a major battle of the war.

But the U.S. was always looking for a quick fix, and a quick fix was simply not possible. The Vietcong were far more patient and willing to pay a higher price. They were less concerned about how long the war lasted or how many lives it took; they took a much longer view. They were in this for the long haul.

Those who were in favor of the use of military power were called "hawks." The peaceniks were called "doves." General Curtis LeMay, a leading general in World War II, thought we should bomb the North Vietnamese "back to the stone age." (That would put him over on the "hawk" side... way over.) But the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam was never seriously considered. The court of world opinion would not have tolerated that.

**Aside: the fog of war - In "Mission with LeMay: My Story," General LeMay writes, "My solution to the problem [of North Vietnam] would be to tell them frankly that they've got to draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we’re going to bomb them back into the Stone Age. And we would shove them back into the Stone Age with Air power or Naval power - not with ground forces."**

Appendix #34i

**However, two years after the publication of this book, The Washington Post (October 4, 1968) reported that General LeMay said, "I never said we should bomb them back to the Stone Age. I said we had the capability to do it. I want to save lives on both sides."**

**Such was the fog of war.**

**The Tet offensive - snatching defeat out of the hands of victory:** In January 1968, during a supposed ceasefire, the North Vietnamese staged a massive attack on positions in the south. The opposition fought back and regained most of the territory they had lost and inflicted 45,000 enemy casualties. So this was, at best, for the north, a stalemate with a horrible loss of life. But the Tet offensive came at a time when Americans had been led to believe that victory was within reach. It was horribly demoralizing, and helped turn public opinion against President Johnson and his conduct of the war.

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

In the 1940s Ho Chi Minh had told the French, "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."   
(http://www.vietnamwar.net/quotations/quotations.htm) He was right then, and he was right in 1968. There was no clearly defined, specific military objective in Vietnam. So the task for many soldiers boiled down to trying to carry out specific orders and trying harder to survive.... one day to the next. That is not a recipe for victory. The soldiers on the ground knew that they were winning the battles, but losing the war.

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

**Author's disclosure: I was not a long-haired peacenik in the 60s, but I was not exactly wild about going to war, either. I was not sure we should be in Vietnam, but I was willing to accept the judgment of my leaders. (Wow, I was naive, wasn't I?) Anyway, I believed that if we should be there, we should get in, do what we had to do to win, and get out. But of course, nobody was listening to me.  
  
I was a student at the American University in Washington, D.C. in the late 60s and early 70s. I saw people and had friends on all sides of the issue. I did not have any close friends who died in Vietnam or who served in the military (as far as I knew). Though I was in the center of the action (stateside), the war never hit close to home for me.  
  
I was subject to the first lottery in 1969; I drew number 273. That meant that I would probably get a pass. Indeed, I was never called to serve. I went on to graduate from college and then get a masters' degree. Uncle Sam never sent me his "Greetings." Had I been called.... of course, I would have served. I considered it my duty... a terribly unpleasant duty; but... many of them are. My father, though he had been dead for five years, would have accepted nothing less from me.**

Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?

Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?

Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?

Appendix 34j

Vietnam Jigsaw 5

**Meanwhile... Back at the Ranch**

It seems that all we read about today and all we hear is that there was nothing but protest and dissension back in the states. That is not correct. For many baby boomers, the war was indeed the primary focus. But for much of the rest of the country, life went on without significant change. Detroit came out with new car models every year, the Great Society rolled on, the economy was strong, the New York Jets continued to improve, and rock & roll music continued to fill our lives. Right up to the end, the majority of Americans supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Still... it takes more than a majority. By early in 1968, President Johnson could see that the war was hurting his party and hurting his country. In March, he decided not to seek re-election to the presidency. President Johnson's decision enabled both his vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, and Senator Robert Kennedy, to speak out forcefully against the war.

Meanwhile, on the Republican side, a "new" Richard Nixon was emerging. Even though he lost the presidential election in 1960 and the California Senate race in 1962, Richard Nixon never gave up. In 1968 he announced that he had a plan to get us out of Vietnam. He did not reveal details, but he gave hope to those who wanted to support the war but did not want it to go on indefinitely.

During the campaign, President Johnson halted bombing in Vietnam to try to promote peace talks with the Vietnamese and give his party a better chance at winning the presidential election. But it was too little, too late. Nixon won, but by only a razor thin majority.

In November 1968, the unofficial National Turn in Your Draft Card Day featured burning of draft cards and war protest rallies at many U. S. campuses. The U.S. death toll in Vietnam was nearly 30,000.

In the summer of 1969, President Nixon announced his "Vietnamization" program. This was his secret plan. He intended to focus U.S. effort on training the South Vietnamese to fight their own battles so that the U.S. could extricate itself from southeast Asia. In October, Nixon said, "I will say confidently that looking ahead just three years the war will be over." In fact, he was not far off. Still, there was much more fighting ahead.

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**



**How it Ended**

Sometime in the late 60s, comedian Bob Hope suggested that the U.S. should just declare victory and come home. (In fact, that was the essence of a recommendation made to the president by Vermont Senator George Aiken in 1966.) That is not far from what President Nixon was trying to do. But it was not quite that simple.

The election of a new president in the U.S. gave the North Vietnamese some political cover to be able to negotiate. But they had the upper hand; they had both time and mounting pressure from within the U.S. on their side. While the fighting went on, peace talks were scheduled to take place in Paris in 1969. But the bickering on every little detail seemed to take forever. I remember that the press reported a major breakthrough when the U.S. and North Vietnam finally agreed on the shape of the table at which they would negotiate and

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

now many people from each side would sit at the table. Really! It was excruciatingly slow and painful. Still... the fighting and the dying went on.

Appendix #34k

In 1970 the peace talks went into a second year. Washington reduced U.S. troop strength in Vietnam to less than 400,000 in response to mounting public pressure. The North Vietnamese knew they were winning... if not on the battlefield, in the larger arena. On May 4, 1970, an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University (Ohio) went too far. A crowd of students rushed toward a team of National Guard troops that had been called in to maintain order. The troops fired on the crowd; four people were killed; eight others were seriously injured. The war was now having serious consequences back home. By 1971, fewer than 200,000 American soldiers were still in Vietnam.

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

In 1972 actress Jane Fonda, an outspoken critic of almost everything American, went to Vietnam as a guest of the North Vietnamese. She was photographed sitting on an anti-aircraft gun that had been used to shoot down U.S. planes. Her actions fueled the fires of dissent in America. That is exactly what the North Vietnamese wanted.

Hoping to outlast another U.S. president, the Vietnamese dug in deeper as peace talks stalled in 1972. But Nixon's Democratic challenger in the election, George McGovern, didn't stand a chance. Nixon knew this better than the North Vietnamese did. In an effort to show resolve, Nixon ordered U.S. planes to bomb the North Vietnamese capital for the first time since 1968.

A resounding election victory for Nixon (November 1972) seemed to make a difference. Less than three months after the election (January 28, 1973), a negotiated ceasefire ended U.S. ground troop involvement in Vietnam. The war had claimed the lives of nearly 50,000 Americans. That is a very small percentage of the total number of troops that served in Vietnam. (And for comparison purposes, about the same number of Americans died in traffic accidents on U.S roads every year. And over 400,000 Americans - combat and non-combat - lost their lives in World War II.) But 50,000 is still... 50,000.

American soldiers and prisoners of war came home. The South Vietnamese Army fought on their own. The U.S. maintained an embassy in South Vietnam, but everyone knew what the eventual outcome would be. President Gerald Ford asked Congress to authorize financial support for South Vietnam. But neither the Congress nor the people were willing to pay any more. The Vietnam War had already cost far too much.

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

**Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?**

**Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?**

Appendix #34l

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| North Vietnamese troops continued to march south toward the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon. In April, 1975, South Vietnam's President Thieu resigned, marking the end of the struggle for a free Vietnam. U.S. helicopters evacuated the last U.S. personnel from Saigon.  The picture on the right shows people lining up to board a helicopter atop a building on the U.S. Embassy grounds in Saigon. It does not show the surrounding chaos and the struggle of the people who fought to be among those evacuated. Many South Vietnamese people who had been loyal to the U.S. were left behind. There was just not enough time to get them all. It was an ugly exit. |  |

The draft lottery along with required military service ended in the mid-70s, in time to save many boomers (and generations that have followed) from that unpleasant letter from Uncle Sam.

In the mid 70s, President Ford offered limited immunity to U.S. draft dodgers who had fled to Canada. Later President Carter expanded the offer, and most draft dodgers returned home.

It was over.

Appendix #34m

Vietnam Jigsaw # 6

**So... What Did We Learn?**

***Whew!*** Entire volumes have been written trying to answer this one. Let me try to sum it up here:

Was the domino theory valid? Maybe. Communism did not spread in Southeast Asia. But it did not spread anywhere else in the world, either. Did the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia serve as a deterrent? Maybe; for sure, the North Vietnamese paid a horrible price for whatever they gained. But throughout the world, communism is dying of its own ineffectiveness more than anything the U.S. military has done to defeat it. Of course, we did not know that in 1965. We had made a commitment to support South Vietnam. But we did not place limits on that commitment.

You cannot force freedom and independence on a society that does not hunger for it. In 1965, the Vietnamese hungered more for food than they did freedom. They will recognize the failure of communism eventually, but not because of bullets or rockets that somebody may hurl at them.

In a free and open society, when pursuing a military engagement, you must have overwhelming public support. A strong, vocal, significant minority can turn public support against the action.

It is nearly impossible to win against a determined, large enemy in their territory, in rugged terrain, hills, or other places where the enemy can easily hide.

In any military engagement, you must have overwhelming force, a clearly defined objective, and a precise way to measure victory and a specific plan for achieving it.

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**



The domino theory, however valid it may have been in 1965, is an obsolete notion in the 21st century. Certainly we will never fight a war in the manner that we fought the Vietnam War. Technology and lessons from Vietnam will keep another generation from enduring what we had to.

That is the legacy of the Vietnam War. We learned a great deal... but we paid an enormous price.

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

**A Terrible Mistake?**

Was the Vietnam War a terrible mistake? Well, it is easy to conclude that today. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to ask how we could have been so stupid as to get involved in such a mess. But it was not so black-and-white back then. Just as I cannot imagine the fear and suspicion my parents' generation had of the Empire of Japan or Hitler's Third Reich, today's young adults cannot imagine the fear and suspicion we had of communism in the 50s and 60s.

Forty years later, former defense secretary Robert McNamara seems ambivalent about the right-or-wrong of Vietnam. He quotes Robert Kagan, who wrote that the Vietnam War was a "logical consequence of the policy of containment," a policy which we had held for half a century.

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

Appendix #34n

**"Of Paradise and Power: America vs. Europe in the New World Order," Robert Kagan, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:  
"The Vietnam War was not the brainchild of three or four people. It was a product of a whole way of thinking about the world. It was, for better or worse, the logical consequence of the policy of containment. And the breadth and depth of support for American policy in Vietnam, certainly in the elite intellectual class, was enormous: journalists, government, policy. Let's not suggest that this was somehow just the Bundys or Walt Rostow. This was national consensus."**

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

A "logical consequence" -- something to think about, huh?

**Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?**

**Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?**

Appendix #34o

Vietnam Jigsaw 7

**Iraq - Another Vietnam?**

In the summer of 2003, fear mongers began talking of the supposed "quagmire" in Iraq. Many pundits expressed concern that by liberating Iraq, we have gotten ourselves into another Vietnam. Well, I have just one word for that notion: ***nonsense!*** There are so many differences between Vietnam and Iraq that only someone who is not thinking clearly or who did not live through the 60s and 70s could sincerely make such a claim. Here are a few of the major differences:

1. In Vietnam, the major fighting lasted nearly a decade. In Iraq, it was over in three weeks.
2. In Vietnam, there was never a clear winner until the U.S. pulled out. In Iraq, the winner was never in doubt.
3. In Vietnam, the enemy received significant support from other countries. No country openly supported Saddam Hussein.
4. In Vietnam, the terrain made finding and fighting the enemy extremely difficult. Only our desire to minimize civilian casualties makes finding the enemy difficult in Iraq. That is a much smaller hurdle to overcome.
5. In Vietnam, the enemy was comprised of millions of soldiers determined to wait us out and grind us down. They fervently supported their cause. In Iraq, there are very few who support Saddam Hussein, even fewer who believe in his cause. The enemy is much less determined in this battle.
6. In Vietnam, U.S. soldiers were dying at the rate of 20 each day. In the summer of 2003, the rate was 1 per day. It has bounced up and down since then, but it is still nowhere close to what it was in Vietnam.
7. In Vietnam, American soldiers were drafted into the military - they had no reasonable choice. Today our military is comprised entirely of volunteers.
8. In Vietnam, the military commanders in the field misled their superiors in Washington, providing a more positive picture than actually existed. That is simply not possible today - not to the degree that it occurred in Vietnam.
9. In Vietnam, those we were trying to liberate were ambivalent. They did not care about communism or democracy. They just wanted to be left alone. At least Ho Chi Minh left his people alone - for the most part. Only those whom Saddam Hussein bribed wanted to keep things as they were. The Iraqi people craved freedom from Hussein.

**Connections: What do I already know about this?**

1. Prior to Vietnam, our history was one of complete victory. We had never lost a war. We thought we could bomb our way to victory. By 2003, we knew better. Today we have 76 million military advisors warning our leaders that we cannot and will not get bogged down in another Vietnam.

**Questioning: What questions do I have? What am I wondering about? Am I confused?**

In the fall of 2003, John McCain, a Vietnam veteran and U.S. senator, wrote, "Iraq is not Vietnam. There is no popular, anti-colonial insurgency in Iraq. Our opponents, who number only in the thousands in a country of 23 million, are despised by the vast majority of Iraqis. The Iraqi insurgents do not enjoy the kind of sanctuary North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos provided. They do not have a superpower patron. These murderers cannot carry the banner of Iraqi nationalism, as Ho Chi Minh did in Vietnam for decades."

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The mess in Iraq appears to be drawing terrorists to Iraq. Nothing like that happened in during the Vietnam War. But that is not a characteristic of the war in Iraq. That is a characteristic of terrorism.

The Democrats and other Bush-haters are doing all they can to make Iraq another Vietnam. On August 21, 2005 Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska joined the invokers: "We are locked into a bogged-down problem, not . . . dissimilar to where we were in Vietnam."

**Visualizing: What images or pictures do I create in my mind?**

Well, no.

Americans had no reason to feel that their own security was at risk in Vietnam, whereas the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 made it clear that the enemy we face today poses a lethal threat here at home as well.

In October 2005, Opinionjounal.com reported that, like the Democrats, the terrorists are trying to turn the mess in Iraq into another Vietnam:

"In a letter to his top deputy in Iraq, al-Qaeda's No. 2 leader said the United States 'ran and left their agents' in Vietnam and the jihadists must have a plan ready to fill the void if the Americans suddenly leave Iraq," the Associated Press reports from Washington:

"Things may develop faster than we imagine," Ayman al-Zawahri wrote in a letter to his top deputy in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. "The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam--and how they ran and left their agents--is noteworthy. . . . We must be ready starting now." . . .

**Reading Comprehension:**

**Do I understand what I am reading?**

"More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media," he wrote.

Is Iraq another Vietnam? Zarqawi thinks so, as do "antiwar" politicians here in America and many in the media. And in this respect, at least, Iraq does resemble Vietnam: America's enemies and domestic opponents of the war, acting in sync if not in concert, are attempting to defeat the war effort "in the battlefield of the media."

But there the similarity ends. For one thing, the media are nowhere near as monolithic, or as powerful, as they were during the Vietnam era. Arguably the war in Vietnam was lost when Walter Cronkite declared as much after the Tet Offensive. Cronkite's lapse into advocacy was, as Newsweek's Howard Fineman argued in January, the beginning of the end of "the notion of a neutral, non-partisan mainstream press." Cronkite and his successors squandered the public trust they had earned, with the result that no journalist today--no, not even your humble columnist!--comes anywhere close to wearing the mantle of "most trusted man in America."

**Inferring: What is the author telling between the lines?**

**Synthesizing: How has my thinking changed? Do I have some new ideas?**

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For another, there is no serious antiwar movement today. Antiwar protests in 2005 consist of the same crackpot rent-a-mobs who long before 9/11 were disrupting meetings of groups like the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. Cindy Sheehan is a case in point: Sold by the media as a grieving Everymom, she turned out to be an America-hating lunatic. Thus, as we noted Monday, there is no move among American politicians, outside the Angry Left fringe, to withdraw from Iraq or defund the effort there.

Food for thought, huh?

According to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall web page (www.thewall-usa.com), 47,386 American servicemen died as a result of hostile action in Vietnam. At the current rate, the death toll from Iraq's guerrilla war will reach Vietnam's level sometime in the year 2200.

Our problem in Iraq was that we won the major battle too quickly - the enemy ran away before we could conquer all of it. What we see in the spring of 2005 are remnants of the enemy -- those that we missed in the quick takeover, and terrorists imported into Iraq. They will fade in time. **This is no Vietnam!**

**Determining Importance: What is the selection mostly about? What are the major ideas?**

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